

## Message Text

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ORIGIN PA-02

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SOPN, OVIP (KISSINGER)

SUBJECT: PRESS MATERIAL

1. HERewith FULL TEXT THEODORE JACQUENEY OP-ED COLUMN  
WASHINGTON POST MONDAY, DECEMBER 27, HEADED "CUBA'S  
POLITICAL PRISONERS."

2. NOW THAT THE SOVIET UNION HAS ACCEPTED CHILE'S PROPOSAL  
TO RELEASE SOVIET DISSIDENT VLADIMIR BUKOVSKY IN EXCHANGE  
FOR CHILEAN COMMUNIST PARTY CHIEF LUIS CORVALAN, CHILE'S  
SECOND OFFER, TO RELEASE COMMUNIST FORMER SENATOR JORGE  
MONTES IF CUBA WILL FREE HUBER MATOS, BECOMES INCREASINGLY  
IMPORTANT.

3. MATOS IS CONSIDERED A SAKHAROV-LIKE DEMOCRATIC DISSIDENT  
HERO IN CUBA, I DISCOVERED IN EARLY OCTOBER. I SPENT A  
WEEK INTERVIEWING RELEASED POLITICAL PRISONERS, FAMILIES  
AND FRIENDS OF PRISONERS, AND OTHER UNDERGROUND OPPONENTS  
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OF FIDEL CASTRO'S GOVERNMENT WHEN I JOINED A GROUP OF  
RIPON SOCIETY MEMBERS INVITED TO TOUR CUBA.

4. I NEGLECTED TO MENTION MY POLITICAL-PRISONER INTERESTS  
TO CUBAN U.N. OFFICIALS CHARGED WITH CLEARING VISITORS,  
BUT ONCE IN HAVANA I RARELY WENT ON THE PROGRAMMED OFFICIAL

TOURS. INSTEAD, I VISITED PEOPLE TO WHOM I HAD BROUGHT INTRODUCTIONS. THROUGH SUCH PEOPLE I COMMUNICATED WITH CELL MATES OF HUBER MATOS IN LA CABANA PRISON OUTSIDE OF HAVANA.

5. PERHAPS THE BEST-KNOWN CUBAN POLITICAL PRISONER, MATOS WAS ONCE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S "POLITICAL PRISONER OF THE YEAR." HE WAS A COMMANDER IN CASTRO'S REBEL ARMY AND BECAME MILITARY CHIEF OF CAMAGUEY PROVINCE IN JANUARY 1959, IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING REVOLUTIONARY VICTORY. TEN MONTHS LATER HE RESIGNED, PROTESTING INCREASED COMMUNIST DOMINA-

TION OF THE NEW REGIME, AND WAS ARRESTED ON THE NOW-IRONIC CHARGE OF "SLANDERING THE REVOLUTION BY CALLING IT 'COMMUNIST,'" A CHARGE LATER CHANGED TO "TREASON." SENTENCED TO 20 YEARS, MATOS HAS BEEN IN VARIOUS PRISONS SINCE OCTOBER 1959.

6. MATOS WAS SENT TO A SECURITY HOSPITAL ROOM SOMETIME IN SEPTEMBER OR OCTOBER 1976, ACCORDING TO INFORMATION RECEIVED FROM HIS CELL. NO ONE KNEW WHERE, OR WHY. THERE WERE NO ALLEGATIONS OF RECENT TORTURE OR BEATINGS. MATOS HAS BEEN HELD INCOMMUNICADO FOR THE PAST SIX YEARS. MEMBERS OF HIS FAMILY IN CUBA, INCLUDING HIS FATHER WHO IS NOW OVER 90 YEARS OLD, HAVE TRIED REPEATEDLY TO VISIT MATOS DURING THIS PERIOD--ALL UNSUCCESSFULLY.

7. THE "MATOS CELL" WAS DESCRIBED TO ME AS 60 SQUARE METERS, UNDERGROUND. DURING THE PAST SIX YEARS, FROM 7 UP TO 16 MEN HAVE BEEN CROWDED INTO THE CELL. SEVEN ARE UNCLASSIFIED

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THERE NOW. THE CELL IS KEPT IN TOTAL DARKNESS. A CANVAS SHEET FASTENED OVER THE TWO WINDOWS TO BLOCK THE DAY-LIGHT HAS BEEN REPLACED BY METAL SHEETS, WHICH KEEP THE ROOM DARKER, HOTTER AND MORE HUMID THAN EVER. AN INTERIOR HALL PROVIDES THE CELL'S ONLY VENTILATION. THE MEN ARE PERMITTED TO SEE THE SUNLIGHT ONLY THREE TIMES A WEEK, FOR TWO-HOUR PERIODS. "IN THE SUMMER THEY HAVE TO CARRY WATER INTO THE CELL TO POUR OVER THEMSELVES. OTHERWISE THEY COULD NOT LIVE, BECAUSE OF THE HEAT," I WAS TOLD.

8. ALMOST ALL OF THE 400 POLITICAL PRISONERS IN LA CABANA-- CALLED "PLANTADOS"--HAVE ALLEGEDLY SUFFERED THE LOSS OF MANY TEETH, AND A FEW HAVE LOST ALL. PRISONS ARE ALSO INFESTED WITH RATS, MICE AND "ALL KINDS OF INSECTS." A BITING BEDBUG WAS DESCRIBED AS PARTICULARLY TROUBLESOME.

9. FROM THE MATOS CELL, PRISONERS REPORT STEADILY WORSENING

VISION LOSS CAUSED BY LACK OF LIGHT, LIMB PARALYSIS,

HAIR AND EYEBROW HAIR LOSS, STOMACH ULCERS AND CIRCULATION PROBLEMS. ANOTHER DISTURBING HEALTH CRISIS WAS DESCRIBED TO ME AS EXTREME "NERVOUSNESS," WITH SYMPTOMS EXPLAINED AS UNCONTROLLABLE HEAD-FLICKINGS, EYE-DARTINGS, RAPID GESTURES AND SLEEPLESSNESS--SOME IN THE MATOS CELL ARE REPORTED TO WAKE UP SCREAMING THROUGH THE NIGHT--SYMPTOMS POSSIBLY CAUSED BY LONGTERM, CLOSELY PACKED, DARK, HOT, DAMP LIVING CONDITIONS.

10. POLITICAL PRISONERS IN LA CABANA'S "GALERIES"--PRISON WARDS SLEEPING 60-70 MEN IN LA CABANA, 100 OR MORE IN OTHER PRISONS USUALLY WITH ONE TOILET PER WARD--HAD BEEN REJECTING THE FOOD BROUGHT TO THEM WHILE I WAS IN HAVANA. "ROTTING MAIZE PORRIDGE SERVED WITH SALT TWICE DAILY, WITH RICE, MEAT, FISH AND VEGETABLES SERVED ONLY RARELY, PRODUCING SEVERE PROTEIN DEFICIENCIES," I UNCLASSIFIED

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WAS TOLD.

11. ONE INTERVIEW WITH A GROUP OF OBVIOUSLY FRIGHTENED WOMEN SET THE TONE FOR MANY OF MY CONVERSATIONS IN CUBA. THE FIRST WORDS SPOKEN TO ME AFTER MY CONTACT INTRODUCED ME WERE, "WHAT DO YOU HEAR IN AMERICA ABOUT OUR POLITICAL PRISONERS?"

12. ANOTHER TIME, IN ANOTHER GROUP, A MAN WHO DESCRIBED HIMSELF CAREFULLY AS A "CENTER-LEFTIST," PLEASED WITH MUCH ABOUT THE CUBAN REVOLUTION, SUDDENLY BLURTED OUT, "WHEN I HEARD ON A FOREIGN RADIO BROADCAST OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES' INVESTIGATING POLITICAL PRISONERS IN CHILE, I CRIED. WHY DON'T THEY COME HERE AND LOOK INTO OUR POLITICAL PRISONERS, WHO HAVE BEEN TREATED AS HARSHLY AS IN CHILE AND HAVE BEEN IN PRISON SO MUCH LONGER?" (END TEXT)  
ROBINSON

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